Hammer: "If the place isn't hotting up, we're fucked"

Beard: "Here's is the good news. The UN estimates that already a third of a million people a year are dying from climate change. Bangladesh is going down … Methane is pouring out of the Siberian permafrost. There is a meltdown under the Greenland ice sheet … Two years ago we lost forty per cent of the Arctic summer ice … The future has arrived, Toby."

Hammer: "Yeah, I guess"

Beard: "Toby, listen. It is a catastrophe. Relax"

Trouble with Nature
"Ecology as the New Opium for the Masses"

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Second meeting of the Human-Nature Platform
The natures of natures in political ecology
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"If we do nothing, the consequences for every person on this earth will be severe and unprecedented - with vast numbers of environmental refugees, social instability and decimated economies: far worse than anything which we are seeing today … We have 100 months left to act." (Prince Charles, March 2009)

45 more to go !!!

"Let's start by stating that after 'the rights of man', the rise of the 'the rights of Nature' is a contemporary form of the opium for the people. It is an only slightly camouflaged religion: the millenarian terror, concern for everything save the properly political destiny of peoples, new instruments for control of everyday life, the fear of death and catastrophes …. It is a gigantic operation in the depoliticization of subjects" (Badiou 2008: 139).

"**In the name of indisputable facts portraying a bleak future for humanity, green politics has succeeded in de-politicizing political passions to the point of leaving citizens nothing but gloomy asceticism, a terror of violating nature and an indifference towards the modernization of modernity."** (Beck, 2010)

1. **Welcome to the Anthropocene – Anthropocenic natures**

2. **Nature and its more recent derivatives like 'sustainability' are 'empty' signifiers.**

3. **There is no such thing as a singular Nature around which an environmentally and socially just politics can be constructed and performed. Rather, there are a multitude of natures and a multitude of existing, possible or practical socio-natural relations.**

4. **The focus on a singular Nature that requires 'sustaining' or, at least, 'managing', is sustained by a particular 'quilting' of Nature that forecloses asking political questions about immediately and really possible alternative socio-natural arrangements.**

5. **I conclude with a call for a re-politicization of the environment, one that is predicated upon the recognition of the indeterminacy of natures, the constitutive split of the people, the unconditional democratic presumption of equality, and the real possibility for the inauguration of different possible public socio-ecological futures that express the democratic presumptions of freedom and equality.**

1. Welcome the Anthropocene?

- **The Anthropocene as new geological era: The IUGS' and Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy's conundrum (2016)**

- **Re-affirming the Political Nature of Nature: bringing the political into the environment. – The Earth as matter of concern and terrain of public dispute (requilting Nature)**

- **The 'Catastrophe' has already begun: combined and uneven catastrophe**

- **What's in a name?: Capitalocene (J. Moore) – Oliganthropocene (an epoch of a few men and even fewer women)**

- **Confirming the End of Nature: from politicizing the environment to environmentalizing politics.**

2. Nature does not exist!
The empty core of Nature – Multiple natures

Nature as empty/floating signifier

- **Metonymic sequences and the Chesterfield Sofa**
  "Nature is a transcendental term in a material mask that stands at the end of a potentially infinite series of other terms that collapse into it" (Morton, 2007: 14)

- **Nature as symbolically charged (force of law -- plurality of fantasies and desires – libidinal displacement)**

- **Nature versus the indeterminacies of natures (Latour, Levins/Lewontin, S.J. Gould)**

- **The Real of natures (socio-ecological assemblages) versus the Fantasies of Nature or …. 'Nature does not exist!'.**

3. The fantasy of Nature's catastrophe

- Real and present danger
- Ecologies of Fear
- Techno-managerial dispositifs
- Apocalypse without redemption
  - environmental apocalyptic imaginaries are 'leaving behind any hope of rebirth or renewal …. in favor of an unquenchable fascination with being on the verge of an end that never comes' (Jay 1994: 33)
- Neil Smith appropriately refers to this as 'nature-washing', whereby the socio-ecological origins of the problems are recognised while this "socially changed nature becomes a new super determinant of our social fate"

- **Such ecologies of fear ultimately conceal, yet nurture, a conservative or, at least, reactionary message. While clouded in rhetoric of the need for radical change in order to avoid immanent catastrophe, a range of technical, social, managerial, physical and other measures have to be taken to make sure that things remain the same, that nothing Really changes.**

- **This constellation leads Alain Badiou to insist that ecology has become the new opium for the masses, replacing religion as the axis around which our fear for social disintegration becomes articulated (but without the promise of redemption – it is apocalypse forever postponed – a discursive matrix of recurrent 'crisis')**

- **"it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (Jameson 2003: 76).**

- **The ecological condition is not really taken seriously: "Despite the fact that we know very well that the world is in serious ecological trouble, we continue as if we do not know" (Zizek)**

Managing catastrophe: sustainability

The container signifier that encapsulates these post-political (techno-managerial) attempts to deal with Nature is, of course, 'sustainability'. Even more so than the slippery and floating meanings of Nature, 'sustainability' is the empty signifier par excellence. It refers to nothing and everything at the same time. Its prophylactic qualities can only be suggested by adding specifying metaphors

- The fantasy of imagining a benign and 'sustainable' Nature avoids asking the politically sensitive, but vital, question as to what kind of socio-environmental arrangements and assemblages we wish to produce, how this can be achieved, and what sort of environments we wish to inhabit, while at the same time acknowledging the radical contingency and decidability of natures.

- This is the clearest expression of the structure of fantasy in the Lacanian sense. While it is impossible to specify what exactly sustainability is all about (except in most general or generic of terms), this void of meaning is captured by a multiplying series of fantasies, of stories and imaginations that try to bridge the constitutive gap between the indeterminacies of natures on the one hand (and the associated fear of the continuous return of the Real of nature in the guise of ecological disasters like droughts, hurricanes, floods, etc....) and the always frustrated desire for some sort of harmonious and equitable socio-ecological living (experienced as loss, gap or abyss) on the other, one that disavows the absence of a foundation for the social in a Nature that, after all, does not exist.

- It is in this phantasmagorical space that the proper political dimension disappears to be replaced by a consensually established frame that calls for techno-managerial action in the name of humanity, social integration, the earth and its human and non-human inhabitants, all peoples in all places.

4. 'Sustainability' as Post-Political Environmental Populism

- It is based on the expertise of an assumedly neutral scientific knowledge aristocracy.

- This discourse invokes THE people (as well as non-humans) as a whole. Although socio-spatial differences and inequalities are acknowledged, the environmental threat is global, and affects everyone and everything

- 'Sustainability' does not identify a privileged subject of change (like the proletariat for Marx, women for feminists, or the 'creative class' for neo-liberal capitalism), but instead invokes a common condition or predicament, the need for common humanity-wide action, mutual collaboration and co-operation. There are no internal social tensions or internal generative conflicts; it is a populist gesture that disavows the agonistic heterogeneity of 'the people'

- **Instead the 'enemy' is externalised and objectified. Its fundamental fantasy is that of *an intruder*, or more usually a group of intruders, who have *corrupted* the system**

- **Problems, therefore, are not the result of the 'system' as such or a fatal flow inscribed in the system, but transposed on to the Thing itself, which is staged as some pathological excess. That is, of course, why the solution can be found in dealing with the 'pathological' phenomenon, the resolution for which resides in the system itself.**

- **The institutional architecture of such inherently populist governing takes the form of stakeholder participatory governance that operates beyond-the-state and is performative through forms of self-management, self-organisation, and controlled self-disciplining**

5. De- and Re-politicization

Such post-political arrangement signals a depoliticised (in the sense of the disappearance of the democratic agonistic struggle over the content and direction of socio-ecological life) public space whereby expertise, interest intermediation/negotiation, and administration through governance defines the zero-level of politics.

The catastrophe has already happened

- A re-politicization of the environmental question needs to accept the extraordinary variability of natures, to insist on the need to make 'a wager' on natures, to accept the risk of failure; it forces to chose politically between this rather than that socio-nature, invites us to plunge in the relatively unknown, to expect the unexpected, accept that not all there is can be known.

- Any political act is one that re-orders socio-ecological co-ordinates and patterns, reconfigures uneven socio-ecological relations, often with unforeseen or unforeseeable, consequences.

- **Reclaiming proper democracy and proper democratic public spaces (as spaces fo the enunciation of egalitarian agonistic dispute) as a foundation and condition of possibility for a different, but democratic, socio-ecological order.**

- **The naming of positively embodied ega-libertarian socio-ecological future that is immediately realisable: Post-politics is about realising the possible – The Political is about demanding the impossible.**

- **Repoliticising natures as socio-ecological assemblages: commoning the commons**

The catastrophe is already here

"It's useless to *wait* – for a breakthrough, for the revolution, the nuclear apocalypse or a social movement. To go on waiting is madness. The catastrophe is not coming, it is here. We are already situated *within* the collapse of a civilization. It is within this reality that we must choose sides" (the Invisible Committee)